Critical Review of Five Major L2 Syllabus Designs

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1. Introduction

This paper will provide a critical review on L2 syllabus designs. It will cover major designs from a historical perspective and discuss their significance within the realm of L2 classroom teaching and methodology. While running through the points, it will also be looking toward the future by uncovering candidates for incorporation into a new, dynamically designed syllabus. Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 discuss the rationale behind syllabus design while section 6 provides a highly critical review of five major Syllabus types: the Grammatical Syllabus, the Notional-Functional Syllabus, the Lexical Syllabus, the Task-Based Syllabus, and the Content-based Syllabus.

2. The Syllabus Purpose

What is the purpose of a syllabus of the L2 classroom? Robinson (2011:294) describes syllabus design as the compilation of decisions regarding *units* and their *sequence* of performance. At the lowest level, the syllabus may simply be a reminder or a list of things to do for the busy teacher who has little classroom planning time. However, a good syllabus does much more than that. Upon examination, a well-written syllabus could provide a doorway into the pedagogical beliefs of the course writer. For example, the difference between a grammatical syllabus and a task-based syllabus should be recognizable, even though modern syllabi seem to take a more eclectic approach than ever before.

In many contexts, the syllabus is synonymous with the chosen coursebook (or its table of contents). So, in light of this, what can (should) ELT coursebooks and materials do to facilitate language acquisition? Below is a modified version of a list from Tomlinson (2008: 6).

-Provide rich experience with varying genres and text types

-Provide aesthetically positive experience through graphical design

-Use of multimedia for rich and varied language learning

-Help learners make discoveries for themselves

-Help learners become autonomous language learners

-Providing supplementary materials for extensive listening and reading

-Help learners personalize and localize their language learning

How can, and perhaps should, these points inform the design of syllabi? In this paper I will consider the above points while examining several types of syllabi. I will discuss approaches regarding how materials can be evaluated, and how then can be adapted/designed to meet the needs of the learners and the teaching context.

Let us move on to a brief discussion on *Syllabus* vs *Curriculum*. Is there a difference? Richards (2001:2) distinguishes a difference is scope. Historically in the UK, syllabus design fits within the curriculum design; the curriculum is the bigger picture. A curriculum can incorporate three steps within the bigger picture of L2 teaching: (1) course planning, (2) materials/methods, and (3) course evaluation (Nunan, 1988:4-5). Traditionally, because grammar teaching was the norm, syllabus design was simply the order of grammar that would be taught within the framework of the bigger picture, or the curriculum. However, due the rise in more modern syllabi, *needs analysis* and other types of meta-analysis have forced a change of the meaning and importance of the syllabus (Tagg and Woodward, 2011), therefore making the lines between the two blurry. Moreover, this discussion is focused on the British usage; in the United States, the two terms are often considered synonymous. This paper will implement the British style, unless stated otherwise.

Armed with a better understanding of the syllabus, what purposes of the syllabus are conceivable? From Hutchinson and Waters (1987:83-84):

•to break language down into manageable units and provide a practical basis for
    textbooks and instructional blocks

•to thus provide teachers and learners with moral support

•to reassure students and/or sponsors that a course has been well planned: its
    cosmetic role
•to give both students and teachers an idea of where the course is going
•to act as an implicit statement of the views held by the course designers
    regarding language and language learning—telling students not only *what* they
    are to learn but *why*
•to guide the selection of materials, texts and exercises
•to ensure an element of uniformity across a school or educational system
•to assess how successful a student has been during a course by providing a
    basis for testing

Perhaps more importantly, and besides the proposed purposes, what should the syllabus (and/or materials) being used achieve? One point Tomlinson (2011) brings up is *impact*. However, he admits that impact in Brazil may not equate to impact in Austria. But even then, we should embrace his concept. In general strokes, how can impact be achieved? Tomlinson provides a useful list that can help benchmark assessment of syllabus and material design (2011:8).

A. Novelty
B. Variety
C. Attractive presentation
D. Appealing content
E. Achievable challenge

3. Is the coursebook a syllabus?

The coursebook (or its table of contents) does not have to be, and in some cases, should *not* be, used as a real syllabus design. However, for pragmatic purposes, the coursebook (or the coursebook's table of contents) is often a substitute for a specially designed syllabus. Why might this be a problem? Although there are plenty of useful lists published to help in the assessment of syllabus design, as a textbook writer, I have become aware that textbook publishers and their editors often put priority on designs that will sell the biggest numbers, and not always prioritize what may be best for the students. Financial success on the global scale force editors and writers to publish for the global scale and seldom for the needs of specific classrooms, let alone specific students. This is a very

inconvenient truth, also acknowledged by Tomlinson (2003, 2008). There are several other obstacles for writers:

> Materials writers are faced with a number of competing demands, then. They
> need to make their materials suitable for a wide variety of teachers, who have
> different amounts of experience, are more or less qualified, and who may
> have differing teaching styles and beliefs. As Johnson et al.'s (2008) study
> shows, experienced and inexperienced teachers may be looking for different
> things from materials. (Harwood, 2011:14)

In the above quote, Harwood discusses the difficulties and eludes to the compromises that are inherent in coursebook writing. With such compromises in place, should the coursebook table of contents be used as the official syllabus of the course? Harwood continues (2011:14-15):

> Textbook writers need to make their materials easy enough to follow for the
> inexperienced teacher by, for instance, making activities build upon one
> another in a transparent and predictable sequence, or by providing detailed
> teachers' notes, while at the same time ensuring the materials are flexible
> enough for the more experienced teacher to adapt in any number of ways. In
> the words of a textbook editor, then, authors are trying 'to please all the
> people all the time' (Young 1990: 77; see also Mares 2003).

From experience, I can say that it is common procedure for university EFL instructors in Japan to use the table of contents from their chosen textbook as a quick template for their official syllabus. Perhaps this is common across the globe. Sinclair and Renouf (1988) see obvious reasons for this phenomenon such as (1) convenience and (2) lack of supporting documents. If tests are based upon the textbooks, perhaps all the more reason to adhere to the textbook's laid down path. Perhaps the best solution then is to base the syllabus on the coursebook's table of contents, but assume that making adaptations should be the norm. That being said, a good syllabus should at least hint at assessment protocols, if not clearly define them. Most mainstream coursebooks do not impose student assessment protocols, nor do they necessarily mandate a particular methodology. For example, the so-called *communicative* coursebooks often leave the specific methodology up to the teacher (Whong, 2011), presumably because many of them are a mish-mash anyway. Because of these points, the

coursebook (or its table of contents) should not be equated with the syllabus, although why this is done on the global scale is understandable.

4. Syllabus Analysis

Richards and Rodgers (2001:20-34) discuss their tiered framework for evaluating methodologies. The three tiers are *Approach* (the underlying theories), *Design* (selection of content), and *Procedure* (specifics of the activities). This has become a somewhat standard tiering framework for TEFL/TESL courses. It is a method that forces the user to consider the development and the connectedness across the three tiers. For novice teachers and novice course writers, it forces contemplation regarding theoretical approaches. As some teachers inevitably like to 'play it by ear' and don't care to think about pedagogical theory, an adaptation of Richards and Rogers' framework (Fig.1) may help teachers and writers to sharpen their awareness of theory, and force them to examine how theory relates to the design of   courses, the procedures within the classroom, and how it ultimately affects theory by either fortifying it or editing it.
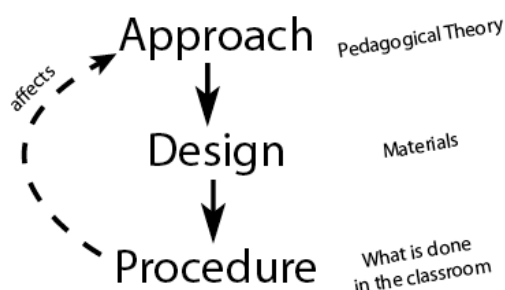

Fig.1. The dynamic effects of the Approach-Design-Procedure framework.

4.1 Product vs Process

There is a significant syllabi dichotomy: *product* vs *process*. The product syllabus focuses on what linguistic content is to be learned. It is very clear and formal — such as a list of grammar points, or vocabulary words. This may be suited for standardized tests such as the TOEIC where everything is clearly prescribed and relatively transparent. The product syllabus and the standardized test have a reciprocal relationship; they tend to inform each other and can create their own microcosm (Fig.2). This is a potential hazard. Since they can (and do) exist within their own universe, they can exist without real-world applicability. This is not to say that they are not without merit, but the potential of them turning into an

existence for their own sake is also very real. This type of syllabus can also be called a content-based syllabus, or in extreme cases, *teaching for the test*.
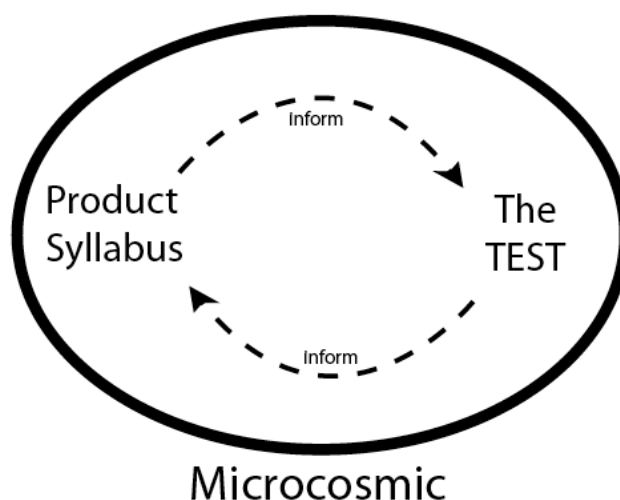

Fig.2. The potential microcosmic nature of the product syllabus and test cycle.

The opposing type of syllabus is the process syllabus. It does not work off a list of words of bullet points, but a set of learning processes. It short, it defines the skills that are to be acquired, not the content. Nunan (1988:40) discusses how the product syllabus and the process syllabus are incompatible. As defined, the latter creates open-ended learning situations that hopes to build skills for the real world, while the former puts sharp focus on very particular content, often disregarding the skills that may be required for real world application (White, 1988). However, it must be realized that although this argument is seemingly logical, it is also fully possible to incorporate both approaches into lesson plans. There is nothing to stop a teacher or course writer from flip-flopping between the two approaches per week, per lesson, or even per activity. Indeed, I'm sure some teachers do flip-flop between these two approaches without even realizing it (as I have done so myself).

4.2 Synthetic vs Analytic

Another significant syllabi dichotomy is: *synthetic* vs *analytic*. Ellis says, (2012: 342), "The former involves a structural approach to teaching that has as its goal the creation of 'form and accuracy contexts', while the latter involves a task-based approach that seeks to create 'meaning-and-fluency contexts'." According to Wilkins (1976), the synthetic syllabus assumes that the teaching of discrete bits of the language will cause a gradual accumulation of parts that will eventually create a whole structural framework for which the L2 will reside.

It assumes that language is like a set of building blocks that can be layered down for a foundation and then built into meaningful structures. Such a syllabus may work well with grammar-based instruction.

What about the analytic syllabus? Robinson (2011:306) assures that due to developments in cognitive research and various other factors, "the shift from synthetic to analytic approaches…. can be expected to continue." The analytic syllabus as Wilkins' describes it, is a list of purposes for the L2 learning and the means to meet those purposes. Identify the needs and then satisfy them with the appropriate language usage. It is a more social and perhaps gregariously reciprocal teaching approach. It is real-world and student-centered. This means that grammar teaching often takes second chair at best, but does not mean that grammar should be dropped entirely, so it is different from Krashen's no-grammar mandates (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

In summation, which is more appropriate for the L2 classroom, synthetic or analytical? To this question, Ellis recently responded in this way (2012: 342-343):

> There is now plenty of evidence to show that both approaches can contribute
> to learning… it will have to be filtered through the teacher's personal
> understanding of the instructional context, and this, to a large extent, will
> depend on experience.

It would seem that although analytical syllabi are in the vogue, elements of a synthetic syllabus can, and perhaps should, be incorporated by the syllabus writer, or engaged as an adaptation by the classroom teacher.

4.3 Linear vs Cyclical

The third syllabi dichotomy is: *Linear* vs *Cyclical*. Is language learning more like a truck that is being loaded with parcels, or is it more organic in nature? The linear syllabus assumes the former, or at least assumes the former is easier to understand on paper. Much like with the previous dichotomies discussed, the linear syllabus is a syllabus that attempts to add new blocks of information to a cumulative mass, creating a greater whole. The more blocks added in succession, the more learning. The problem is, language learning is certainly not linear (Dörnyei, 2008:41). We are not computers; we cannot keep stuffing our hard-drives with new linguistic information and expect it all be retrievable on demand and immediately useful when called upon. Research tells that that language acquisition is much more of an

organic, natural process (Skehan, 1996: 18-19) that would benefit from a cyclical, or recycling, syllabus. Furthermore, *motivation* to learn the L2 is also not linear, but dynamic (Dörnyei, 2011:11). Although this better choice is plainly obvious, this dichotomy is still very relevant because not many mainstream coursebooks (and therefore syllabi) are written cyclically. Yes, it may be assumed that because teachers know that recycling is important, it is overly redundant to incorporate recycling into the syllabus (because the teachers may do the recycling without being prompted to do so), but how much of this should we actually assume? As discussed earlier, some teachers simply use their coursebook's table of contents as the template for their syllabus out of convenience. In other words, we know that some teachers lack motivation — so, can we realistically expect *all* teachers to know about and actually implement recycling without prompting from the coursebook? Or, although it may seem redundant and perhaps a waste of paper, should we produce syllabi and coursebooks that are visibly distinguishable as cyclical? There is no consensus on this yet, but my feeling is that at least some cyclical features should be incorporated into the syllabus.

4.4 Synthesis: Syllabus Analysis

In this section, I examined the purpose of the syllabus. I also identified several syllabi dichotomies. Of particular interest, among the three dichotomies introduced, I identify most with the latter half of each of the dichotomies, that is, I identify most with the Process, Analytic, and Cyclical syllabus types. When cross-referenced in this way, I have come to realize that my own teaching and coursebook writing is indeed process-based, analytical, and cyclical, and that I recommend these styles, although I agree there needs to be focus on form and a focus on product at least some of the time. This concept will be further developed later in the paper.

5. Syllabus Design Factors

This section will focus on several factors of syllabus design and potential assessment schemes. It with then move on to ideas for the future - dynamic designs and motivational material development.

5.1 Design Factors

What factors influence the design of a syllabus? Below is a general list adapted from Tagg and Woodward (2011).

A. Common practice/trends

B. Theories of Second Language Acquisition/pedagogy

C. Wider educational context

D. Course Objectives

E. Learner backgrounds

Of these, mainstream coursebooks would connect most directly with A, B and C. Less mainstream coursebooks may zero in on D, such as coursebooks designed for courses such as *English for Academic Purposes*, or *English for Nursing*. Oddly, this leaves E alone and perhaps left for the teacher to deal with, or to put more bluntly, up to chance. Few teachers, much less coursebook writers, know specific details about their students prior to designing their syllabi, so it is indeed often left up to chance. From a student's point of view, I do not think it is fair to leave what I'd feel is one of the most important factor on this list up to chance, though. What can be done about this? Below (Fig.3) I have designed an assessment sheet for important design factors for consideration during syllabus design. I believe this assessment sheet can be useful during the pre-design stages of syllabus and materials writing, and also as an in-use and post-use assessment plan. It can be applied per chapter for single chapter assessment, then all chapters assessments can be strung together to form the basis of a comprehensive syllabus assessment. Or, it can be used more simplistically by applying one assessment sheet in order to assess the entire syllabus holistically.

Materials Design Factor Assessment Sheet

Rich experiences	1 2 3 4 5
Varying genres	1 2 3 4 5
Aesthetically pleasing	1 2 3 4 5
Rich multimedia	1 2 3 4 5
Learner discovery	1 2 3 4 5
Autonomic learning	1 2 3 4 5
Extensive listening	1 2 3 4 5
Extensive reading	1 2 3 4 5
Personalized content	1 2 3 4 5
Localized content	1 2 3 4 5

Fig. 3. The Materials Design Factor Assessment Sheet

5.2 Toward a Dynamic Design

Referring to a more typical approach, Richards (2001:145) provides possible steps that can be taken during the process of syllabus design. They are as follows:

- Developing a course rationale

- Describing entry and exit levels

- Choosing course content

- Sequencing course content

- Planning course content (frameworks and instructional blocks)

- Preparing scope and sequence

These are called steps, but they should probably be viewed holistically, as simply going from top to bottom would be irresponsible. In fact, it may be beneficial to view them dynamically. Graves (2000), perhaps with similar intentions proposes the following framework (Fig. 4.):
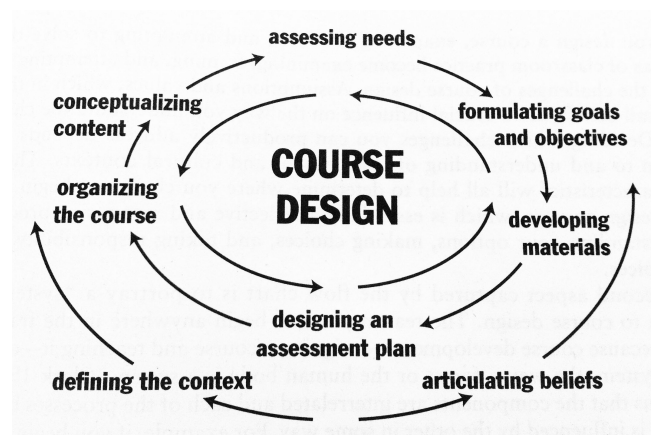
Fig. 4. Graves' Framework for Course Development (2000: Pg)

After consideration of Graves' intricate model, I found it unnecessarily complex, although it may be helpful for some designers. Preferring Richards' list, but desiring a more dynamic relationship between the points, I propose the following model (Fig. 5). All five points must inform each of the other points and from a dynamic relationship, and should therefore be viewed holistically. Although it combines elements from both, I find it to be a more elegant solution than Graves' model, and more realistic than Richards' list.

Fig. 5. Dynamic syllabus design five point model.

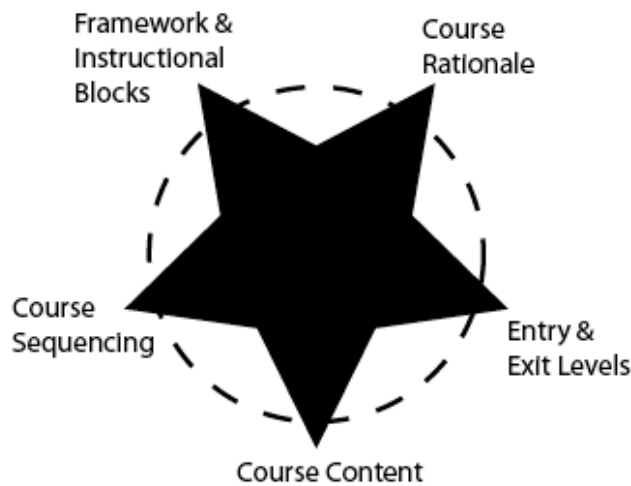A good starting point for writers could be the *course rationale*, but as can be seen in my proposed model above, the course rationale should also be affected and edited in the middle and ultimately even at the very end of the process, influenced by the other four points. Richards suggests that an initializing rationale write up can be a guide during the writing process (2001:146). It can be as little as a few paragraphs discussing the *Who*'s and *What*'s of the course and will ultimately serve as the justification of the course, perhaps touching on the design philosophy as well.

The *entry and exit levels* cap the design nicely when set properly. Historically, mainstream coursebooks typically broke student levels into three (beginner, intermediate, high) and then perhaps five levels. Oxford University Press (OUP) currently boasts nine levels (Fig. 6.). Perhaps this diversification, which is not only an OUP trend, is an indication that learner-centric publications are becoming slightly more popular. It could also mean that publishers are clueless at what they should be doing in this new digital (iPad) age and are simply throwing out titles to see which ones sell. Recent discussions with publishers fortify the latter possibility.

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Starter (20)
Beginner (128)
Pre-Primary (5)
Elementary (147)
Pre-Intermediate (133)
Intermediate (177)
Upper Intermediate (110)
Intermediate Plus (38)
Advanced (72)
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Fig. 6. OUP levels and number of titles in brackets.

Some teacher-researchers see the above list as being still too arbitrary and prefer to divide the learner population by standardized test scores, probably to assist with their research by making clearer (quantitative) distinctions. Indeed, to fill that gap, there are several publishers that have coursebooks designed for teaching TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS, among others. These books line the shelves of bookstores in Japan. While a focus with test preparation books seems fantastically useful (especially for the teacher-researcher), it is also a dangerous step toward *teaching to the test,* as discussed earlier. And as discussed in the Syllabus Analysis section, the combination of the test and coursebook have the potential of becoming their own *raison d'être* amalgamation, with less regard to the real world than there should be. The Common European Framework (CEF), used to assess language learning, is also blossoming in this area.

> The CEF(R) divides general competences in *knowledge* (Descriptive knowledge), *skills*, and *existential competence* with particular communicative competences in *linguistic competence*, *sociolinguistic competence*, and *pragmatic competence*. This division does not exactly match previously well-known notions of *communicative competence*, but correspondences among them can be made. (Wikipedia, accessed Sept., 2012)

Perhaps it is too early to decide how the CEF will play out. It is interesting to note that L2 teacher-researchers in Japan have also taken an interest in the CEF (see O'Dwyer et al., 2011) although a review of that literature base at this time may be premature.

What about the *framework*? As discussed in the Syllabus Analysis section, traditional frameworks used to be not much more than a list of grammar points that were sequenced "logically", but were actually arbitrary in the real-life sense, especially from the cognitive point of view. Human cognitive development does not generally follow systematically designed "logical" patterns, such as past-tense mastery before future-tense mastery. It is much more organic and contextually based (Sousa, 2011). What other types of syllabi are there to choose from? Here is a typical list:

-Grammatical

-Notional-functional

-Lexical

-Situational

-Topical

-Skills-based

-Task-based

-Context-based

The above list is typical list found in most TEFL/TESL courses. I shall discuss four of them in depth, *grammatical, notional-functional, lexical, task-based,* and *context-based* below. Many coursebooks and syllabi adhere to only one of these designs, however, there is nothing stopping a writer/designer from creating an eclectic mixture of ideas for a more diverse framework, as is often the case with 'communicative' coursebooks (Whong, 2011). Such a mixture is sometimes called an *integrated* framework (integrated syllabus). Indeed, an eclectic mixture within a framework would be more like real-life learning which is commonly random in nature anyway. Such an eclectic framework could therefore be more in tune with actual cognitive development — although a totally arbitrary mixture would naturally be hit and miss. The idea for a new type of coursebook framework that is not hit and miss, will be proposed in the follow-up paper to this one.

5.2.1 Instructional blocks

Once the general design or framework begins to take shape, how are the smaller *instructional blocks* to be designed? An instructional block should be somewhat self-contained, yet contribute to the larger objectives of the syllabus (Richards, 2001). To this, Tagg and Woodward (2011) provide the following list of aims:

-To make the course more teachable and learnable

-To provide progression in level of difficulty

-To create overall coherence

The typical syllabus (perhaps based upon a coursebook) would have individual chapters, units, or modules that would be somewhat self-contained and individually assessable. Within each chapter, unit, or module, there may be several subsections that further breakdown the learning into smaller chunks with perhaps a variety of activities designed to advance the students toward the ultimate goal of the chapter/unit/module. Richards (2001:166) furthers: the coherence of the chapter/unit/module should ultimately be both *horizontal* and *vertical,* meaning that there should be front to back coherence throughout the chapter/unit/module, but also, if it were a book, top to bottom coherence on each page (Fig.7). Modern EFL textbooks pay close attention to appealing vertical design for a sense of 'closure' on each page.
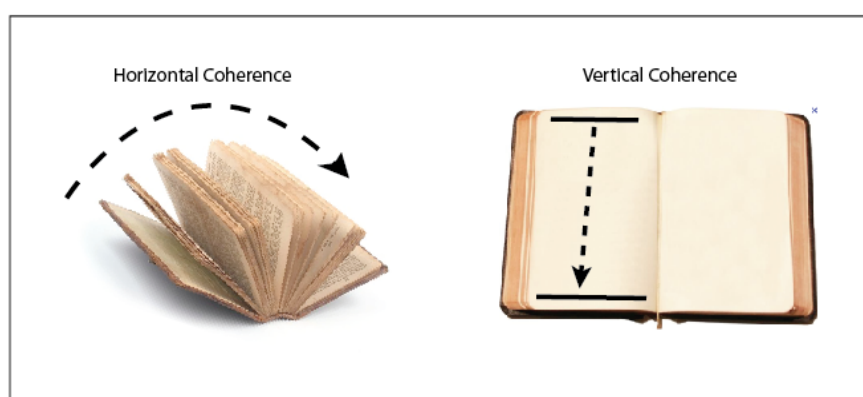
Fig.7. Richards' horizontal and vertical coherence models.

Richards pushes for 'closure' on each page. Several mainstream coursebooks certainly adhere to this maxim, and seem to have this maxim at the basic premise of good page design. However, there are still coursebooks, especially books based on reading skills, where long passages are the norm, that simply ignore this maxim pragmatically; sometimes content characteristics must override design protocols.

5.2.1 Motivation in material development

One concept that is sometimes tragically overlooked is motivation. Tomlinson (2008, 2011) is one researcher who commonly incorporates motivation into his discussion of material development. Dörnyei has done extensive work in motivational strategies and

underlying factors (2001, 2005, 2009, 2011). Surely such a central concept should be applicable and perhaps deserves to at the core of syllabus design. However, as Dörnyei stresses, "not every strategy works in every context!" (2001:30). Moreover, student motivation is centralized around each student and their own learning contexts, inclusive of their home situations and their own teacher's motivational techniques or lack thereof. Motivation is extremely complex. Therefore, it may be overly ambitious to believe that the incorporation of motivational features into syllabus design will be successful, or fully assessable for that matter. That said, such ideas seem to be perfect for a newer dynamic syllabus design. Below (Fig. 8) is an adapted diagram of Dörnyei's components of motivational teaching practice (2001:29).
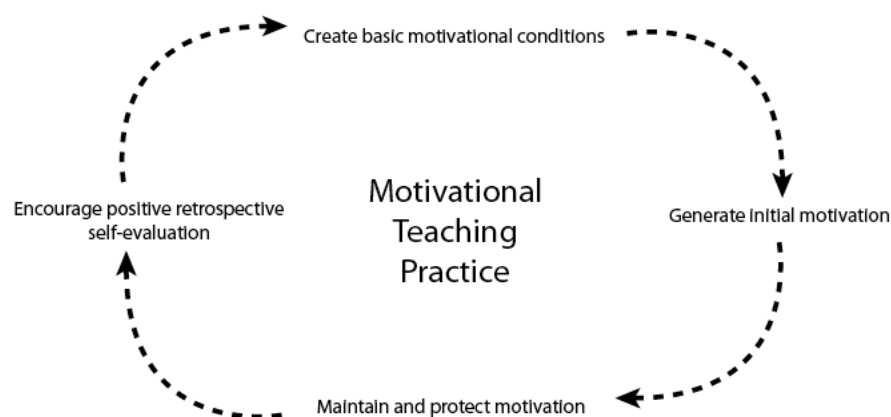
Fig. 8. Components of motivational teaching practice, adapted from Dörnyei, 2001.

Being cyclical in nature, the motivational teaching practice model seems to be fit for implementation (with modification) into cyclical syllabi. Perhaps the entire cycle can be implemented within a syllabus on a per-unit-of-study basis. Additionally, Dörnyei (2005) introduced the *L2 Motivational Self System*:

(1) Ideal L2 self

(2) Ought-to L2 self

(3) L2 Learning Experience

It defined a new way to conceptualize and research motivation. It is introspective, or meta-analytic. Perhaps these reflexive components can also be candidates for a dynamically designed syllabus; they can be incorporated into a syllabus as reflexive questions for learners.

It should prove to be useful for low to high level students. (For example, I have a few lower level university classes with students who study English (L2) because they are required to do so. They have been required to do so since the age of twelve. Syllabus-level metacognitive activities involving the *ideal L2 self* and the *ought-to L2 self* could be very useful for such students because many of them probably have never had a reason to develop concrete thoughts in these areas, hence a potential lack of motivation in these areas. This may be what is separating them from the higher-level students.)

5.3 Synthesis: Syllabus Design Factors

In this section, I examined the purpose of the design factors that go into the creation of a syllabus and identified several points or steps that should be taken on the way to designing a syllabus. I also introduced candidates for dynamic design and discussed my own ideas toward dynamic models, inclusive of motivational theory and components. As discussed earlier, these ideas will be carried over to *Conclusion: Looking toward the future.* The next section will critically analyze four mainstream syllabus types.

6. Some Common Syllabus types

This section will take a look at five common syllabus designs: *grammatical, notional-functional, lexical, task-based,* and *content-based*. I will briefly discuss each of their histories and significance, then, critically analyze their design and potential.

6.1 Grammatical Syllabus

This sub-section shall focus on the grammatical syllabus.   First we must define what grammar is because there are different opinions regarding its definition. Cook (2001:20) offers the following list:

-Prescriptive grammar

-Traditional grammar

-Structural grammar

-Grammar as knowledge in the mind

(1) Prescriptive grammar: As the title implies, this prescribes or attempts to police language usage. It prescribes how language should be spoken and written in a very formal way. However, modern cognitive researchers understand how dynamic and evolving

language necessarily is, therefore prescriptive grammar can and perhaps should be considered *old school*. That said, it is far from dead, as it is still alive in foreign language teaching (Tagg and Woodward, 2011).

(2) Traditional grammar: This type a grammar examines the usage of and the nature between the various parts of speech. It is commonly taught to L1 learners between upper elementary through to junior high school, usually after gaining native level communicative competence via several years of real communication in the L1.

(3) Structural grammar: This is the type of grammar associated most with substitution tables. It examines the structural build up per sentence, from word-phrases to the complete sentence.

(4) Grammar as knowledge in the mind: This is the type of grammar that most non-language teacher L1 users implicitly have; they can produce grammatical utterances without conscious effort.

Before the invention of formal schooling, the only grammar possible would have been type (4), grammar as knowledge in the mind. The advent of formal pedagogy seems to have provided us with the other three types of grammar. It should be of no surprise then that grammatical syllabi commonly only employs the first three types, albeit, deduced from type (4) at some point in history.

The grammatical syllabus, historically, has long been the standard in language teaching. The historical roots of the grammatical syllabus are typically known to have come from the study of *Latin*. However, there is interesting history regarding its refinement in the early to mid 1900s.

According to White (1988), Palmer, then Hornby and West set out to create more a rational progression to the syllabus — from simple to difficult; known to unknown. Hornby published his *Guide to Patterns and Usage in English* (1954) with pedagogy based on sequenced language and a graded syllabus. Palmer and also West, took to vocabulary and laid the groundwork for corpus linguistics; West published *A General Service List of English Words* in 1953. Their idea was, by identifying key vocabulary and studying how they were used, reading skills would improve. Such ideas no doubt also lead to the development of the lexical syllabus. Literature from researchers such as Richards (2001) and White (1988) point to the works of Palmer, Hornby, and West as being highly influential and being a standard reference for coursebook design and graded readers for several years.

Although the grammatical syllabus has long been the standard and influential in language teaching, there have been serious reactionary movements against its popularity since the 1970s. The movements became especially strong throughout the 1980s coinciding with the then growing popularity of Krashen's work.

The historical roots of the grammatical syllabus are typically known to have come from the study of *Latin*. However, because Latin was then and is still a dead language, real communication in Latin was irrelevant. Typically, only the rote memorization of Latin vocabulary and grammatical points, coupled with translation exercises was sufficient to "learn" the Latin language (Brown, 2001:18). However, according to Stern (1983:453-455), the grammatical syllabus was considered successful in Europe because of the ease of assessment — teachers could present a rule and then the students would immediately be able to demonstrate usage in practice sentences.

This view now sounds shallow. Why? Contrary to the dead Latin language, English, one of the most "alive" languages on the planet, deserves a more lively pedagogy, and in the 1970s, a movement began to dethrone grammar-translation from its pedestal. This anti-grammar movement was so strong that its reverberations are still being heard today.

Modern L2 coursebooks that are based on grammar sometimes play down their designs and claim to be *communicative* instead.   A prime example of this is the de facto standard in Japanese junior high schools, *New Horizon* (Tokyo Shoseki), being published since 1966, with at least 40% dominance in Japanese junior high schools (FLANG, 2007). The addition of practice dialogues and more listening components of recent years has allowed advertisers to claim their books are now communicative in design, while the syllabi remains relatively unchanged — still being based upon grammar and catering to the needs of the grammar-translation teaching style which is the traditional and predominant teaching style throughout Japan. Pedagogical preferences aside, it is interesting to note that publishers feel the need to disguise their grammar roots and portray a movement away from grammar-based syllabi.

That said, as Nunan puts it (1988:29), a common view is that "language consists of a finite set of rules" and therefore pedagogy must set out to "crack the code" for students. Believers in the view will probably find the grammatical syllabus to be logical and pragmatic. It is all about (1) selecting the best items to be acquired and then (2) helping attach them to preexisting knowledge. Perhaps this also assumes that language learning is linear in nature, which it is not, but theoretically, a grammatical syllabus *could* be conceived within a cyclically-based framework. This is a highly significant point that will be discussed later.

One of the typical ways to sum up the grammatical syllabus is that is a *product* based syllabus. That is, there may be very little concern for *how* the learning will happen; the learning process and sometimes even its ultimate usage is often considered irrelevant. This typically makes it a non-learner centered *synthetic* syllabus. Focus would have to be on accuracy, to the detriment of fluency. Ironically, in all its seriousness and typically stringent focus on accuracy, in extreme cases, the language structures need *not* be authentic, nor realistic, as long as they are deemed grammatically correct. One example of this would be test questions from Japanese public schools that are designed to assess knowledge of grammar but use synthetic sentences and synthetic passages written by non-native teachers that are unnatural and non-occurring in real life. Assessment would indeed be possible, but to what end?

Tagg and Woodward (2011) provide a pragmatic list of criteria, stemming from Richards (2001) and White (1988), for the grading of grammar points to be taught:
-Simplicity and centrality
-Combinability
-Contrast
-Communicative need and immediacy
-Teachability
-Learnability
-Frequency
-Natural order

All bullet points from above end up being arbitrary and subjective, except for perhaps *natural order* in theory. However, although Krashen (1974) professes natural order, there is little, if any, scientific data that can prove what natural order is. This is due the contextual nature of real-world learning as discussed earlier; all learning is context dependent.

What is the grammar-translation *method*? It is a method of translating text from L2 to L1 and deducing grammatical features (top down), conducted in the L1. It is very straight forward and needs little (or no) L2 communicative competence from the teacher. In the most significant ways, the grammar-translation method (GTM) is the basis of the grammatical syllabus; the method is indeed derived from the teaching of Latin that "explains why this method was not concerned with developing productive L2 competence in the learners" (Dörnyei, 2009:273). In short, GTM is a simplistic and pragmatic method that is regrettably

not "conducive to developing productive language skills."(ibid.) The grammatical syllabus is a systematic extension of this methodology.

Criticisms: The Grammatical syllabus

I have embedded a few of my own criticisms of the grammatical syllabus, above, but there are few more general criticisms about this type of syllabus design from the literature. Skehan (1996) discusses how chosen structures presented by the teacher do not simply lead to language acquisition. Ellis (1997) concurs by saying that teaching may have very little effect on when and how learners may or may not learn a structure because of the internal circumstances per student. Widdowson (1988) argues that because grammar teaching tends to dissociate the structural learning from actual contexts, the true meaning can become lost. This of course questions the very purpose of teaching and learning. Indeed, Lightbown and Spada (1999) bring to light studies that question the effectiveness of grammar-based syllabi, stating that high focus on accuracy did not necessarily lead to higher proficiency. Moreover, those learners were unwilling to take risks in communicating. This is also very apparent in Japan and may be one of the strongest arguments against using a grammar-based syllabus (or the grammar-translation pedagogy), in Japan.

Addressing these criticisms, as we will see in the next subsections, several 'anti-grammatical' conceptions surface. However, after pendulum swings an interesting halfway point did emerge (Dörnyei, 2009). There are several incarnations with confusingly similar name structures, but I shall simply discuss them collectively as a *focus on form* (FoF) here. The premise of was that although a strict grammatical syllabus was proven to be inadequate for most purposes, the full dropping of grammar teaching was equally inadequate (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Dörnyei, 2009; Whong, 2011).

FoF cleverly hid the word *grammar*, while having learners focus on sub-sentence grammatical issues. Sometimes these issues were based on realtime needs, sometimes they were based on *preemptive* or *proactive* decisions by the teacher (or coursewriter). In reality, unless the teacher is focusing on form with real time mistakes of the learners in the classroom, all the preemptive/proactive planning comes dangerously close to being a younger sibling of the grammatical family. It is not my intention is shoot down FoF entirely. In fact, I fully agree with the premise. As long as FoF is grounded in real time student needs, it is a very welcome concept, but I am hesitant to endorse the variants of FoF because they share the same criticisms as the traditional grammatical syllabus.

Advantages: The Grammatical syllabus

Are there advantages to the grammar-based syllabus? It is easy to follow and easy to assess. Such a syllabus can be very transparent, so by going through the steps, there may be a strong feeling of achievement. Progress can be easy to measure.

In short, such a syllabus is easy to manage because of its pragmatic approach. It is also probably familiar to most teachers from their own L1 learning, so it would be relatively easy to implement for novice teachers. Moreover, while it may not make every learner proficient, inevitably, some students *will* and *do* have a strong aptitude with this methodology (due to their "lucky" combination of biological and contextual facets conducive of grammar-based learning proficiency) and therefore some of them will build a natural preference for this methodology. These, for lack of a better term, "lucky" grammar-based learners do excel within this framework.

Advantage or disadvantage?

According to Dörnyei (2009:273), the Grammar-Translation method (and/or the grammatical syllabus) may still favorable because it:

(1) requires little set up time

(2) requires minimal teacher L2 competence and fluency

(3) is safe for the teacher

(4) is easy to assess (with multiple choice tests, for example)

(5) is easy to explicitly focus on (discreet) points

(6) can be mostly taught in the L1

(7) requires no higher-level (meta-cognitive) thinking/assessment

From personal discussions I have had in Japan, I am aware of several Japanese teachers of English that became English teachers *because* of their aptitude and affinity with the grammar-based syllabus and the grammar-translation methodology, so from their perspective, the advantages are obvious — it suited them well. However, armed with the attitude, "This pedagogy worked well (for me), so why can't you do it?" The grammar-based teaching cycle seems to be self-perpetuating at least partially because some of the next generation's best grammar-based students inevitably become grammar-based school teachers themselves. This is naturally self-perpetuating phenomenon. It can be called an advantage for a minority of the population, and a disadvantage for the majority of the population. For the majority of the Japanese English teachers, however, it may be viewed as *the traditional* way,

and, from their neo-Confucian perspective, it is not something to be critically assessed because it was passed down from above.

Synthesis: The Grammatical syllabus

In this subsection, I examined the grammatical syllabus. I discussed its history, rooted in the study of Latin, but refined in the early to mid 1900s.   Although it has advantages as being transparent and pragmatic, there are several criticisms of this type of syllabus design. Perhaps the most important is that although it sets out to be a no-nonsense, pragmatic syllabus, its nevertheless synthetic and moreover, does not often enough result in higher proficiency than other design types. It takes learners "though the motions", and may make learners *feel* like they are studying hard and learning, which may or may not raise their motivation, but by the end of the day it would seem that much of that work goes to waste.

I find that the biggest faults in the grammatical syllabus lie within the inherent *assumptions* that go with it:

(1) L2 learners need to explicitly learn grammar

(2) L2 grammar teaching leads to grammatical L2 usage

(3) L2 grammar has logical rules that are definable, teachable, and learnable

(4) all L2 learners can learn L2 grammar at the same pace

(5) (from proficient teachers) *"I learned it this way, why can't you?"*

These inherent assumptions that may have been nurtured by the long-term historical adherence to grammatical syllabus design, are assumptions that I would define as *old school.* They are traditional assumptions that have no significant neuroscientific basis. Ironically, they can still be found in classrooms that have decided to stop using a grammatical syllabus. This is presumably because these old school assumptions have been carried over to other forms of L2 teaching. This phenomenon shall be discussed in later sections.

The "take –home" ideas for a new syllabus:

It has become clear that a strict grammar-based syllabus should not be pursued, but the lighter version known as FoF is promising, mostly because it was developed as researchers began to re-realize the need to focus on grammar, but decided to balance the grammar instruction more sensibly. The take-home point from this subsection is: *include a need-based FoF component, preferable zeroing in on real-time issues and mistakes (not preemptive guesswork).*

6.2 Notional-functional Syllabus

The notional-functional (NF) syllabus developed in Europe as a reaction toward the grammatical syllabus, although it ultimately, and ironically, gathered many of the same criticisms. What is the NF syllabus? Wilkins' (1976:18) in a definitive statement says;

> (I)t takes the desired communicative capacity as the starting point. In drawing up a notional syllabus, instead of asking how speakers of the language express themselves or when and where they use the language, we ask what it is they communicate through language. We are then able to organize language teaching in terms of the content rather than the form of the language. For this reason the resulting syllabus is called the notional syllabus.

The 1970s showed a shift toward a more communicative approach with more of a focus on context and therefore the social aspects of language usage. Keypoints from Wilkins (1976) are that (1) the NF syllabus is a communicative syllabus, (2) it raises motivation because it is communicative, and (3) it covers "all kinds of language functions" (ibid:19). Let us focus on Wilkins' first point. Is the NF syllabus really a communicative syllabus? Widdowson argues that there is no such thing as a communicative syllabus (1990:130); this categorically disqualifies NF. What is the NF syllabus then? Let us examine the words separately.

White (1988:75) describes *notions* as categories that describe the intentions of the language usage. Nunan (1988:35) describes them as conceptual meanings via language usage such as objects or relationships. Examples would be: time, ownership, direction, frequency, and cause (Nunan, 1988:35). The *functions* are then the communicative purposes of the language in use. Examples would be: approving, persuading, suggesting, and identifying (Nunan, 1988:35). This type of syllabus is a logical step up from the grammatical syllabus, yet it does not attempt to bury grammar. It simply shifts the priority to more meaningful usage (to notions and functions), with the importance of grammar teaching basically remaining intact. However, this was surely a step away from reliance on grammar as the guide for what is to be taught. In this way, it embodied natural language usage more realistically (Whong, 2011).

Although at first glance the NF syllabus may appear to be a process-based syllabus, it still is very much a product-based syllabus, much like the grammar-based syllabus. How can this be? Upon closer examination, although the NF syllabus indeed looks as if it is nuanced to

be a process-based syllabus, ultimately it is still a to-do list telling us *what* is to be learnt with no defining teaching guidelines (the *way* of the learning) to go with it.

For the above reasons, the NF syllabus should not be assumed to be a process-based syllabus. Additionally, it is also a synthetic syllabus by design. It puts forth a list of to-dos, perhaps feigning a sincere level of catering to learner needs derived from discourse analysis research (Stern, 1992), but ultimately the NF syllabus moves on regardless of the learners' real-world needs that may or not have any significant connection to the discourse that had be analyzed nor the results of a some sort of a needs analysis program.

Good intentions, but…

The NF design began with very good intentions/observations: (1) isolated utterances and chunks were not appropriate for study, (2) context must be provided for a better understanding, (3) language learning must include practice with realization of socio-cultural roles (Tagg and Woodward, 2011). So, although it indeed was a to-do list, it was not immediately focused on using the designated "grammar points of the day", but more focused on the naturally occurring discourse per defined situation. Whereas the grammatical syllabus would tend to have learners attempt to *avoid grammatical errors at all costs,* the NF syllabus would tend to have the learners focus on what would be *contextually appropriate*. Herein lies one of its greatest advantages: the advent of role-playing and social interaction activities with notions and functions, *while limiting grammatical absoluteness*.

Upon implementation, it must have become obvious that although the grammatical syllabus was simply expected to be for 'everyone' and therefore a needs analysis program was not seriously considered, an NF syllabus, based on notions and functions of real contexts, had to be designed to match the needs of the students or else the activities could widely inappropriate (White, 1988:83-91) — much more so than the grammatical syllabus. However, being new and still naive with needs analysis as a research tool, researcher-writers tended to only focus on student needs, without regard to the bigger picture (Nunan, 1988).

Criticisms: The Notional-functional Syllabus

What are the criticisms of the NF syllabus? As touched on earlier, the NF syllabus is similar to the grammatical syllabus in many ways, so they share many of the same criticisms. Widdowson (1979) agues that although the shift from a list of grammar points to a list of NF points still produces a *list* — and such lists are not automatically compatible with real learning. Brumfit (1981) identifies difficulties in defining these 'notions' and goes on to

explain the difficulty in applying the learning to real social contexts, seriously attacking the premise of the NF design. Nunan (1988:37) concurs by saying that any division of language into units misrepresents the nature of communication.

In sort, the NF syllabus is as synthetic as the grammatical syllabus. The harsh argument being that only the labels have changed; they are essentially the same syllabus, just dressed up differently. In line with Brumfit's argument, Tagg and Woodward (2011) claim that the NF syllabus may even be *more* difficult to learn from than a grammatical syllabus, pointing at the difficulty in generalizing functions and then creating new utterances from them.

Because of the inherent dependency for a needs analysis, it can be argued that the NF syllabus can only be as good as the quality of the needs analysis. However, it is not possible to conceive a perfect student needs analysis (for example: will the student respond truthfully? Will the student respond comprehensively?). So, the inadequacies of any needs analysis trickle down to the NF selections. This brings up other problems as criteria for assessment and sequencing: Which NF list items should come first and why? How can we decide which functions are more complex? More appropriate? Hence, *the Guinea Pig Argument* (O'Neil, 1977).

O'Neil argues that no matter how well the NF syllabus may be construed, it would never be able to foresee the need to and therefore never be able to help a learner produce an utterance such as, "My guinea pig died with its legs crossed" (which was an actual recorded authentic utterance from a classroom).

The outcomes of NF teaching are not foreseeable because they are not controlled by the syllabus, therefore making comprehensive design and assessment of the outcomes problematic. Furthermore, the lack of protocols may be one reason for its current lack of popularity, especially compared to the grammatical syllabus with its clear focus on accuracy, making assessment not only easy, but, transparent. In this way, although the NF and grammatical syllabi have several similarities, differences such as a lack of focus on accuracy make it more difficult to implement.

Advantages: The Notional-functional Syllabus

What are the advantages of the NF syllabus? Conceived as an improvement over the grammatical syllabus, there are several advantages to it. It can implement more realistic learning tasks based on real-world communication. It provides a means for contextual understanding and realization before performance because it grasps onto cultural needs

(Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983:17). But perhaps most importantly, the lack of assessment protocols discussed as a disadvantage on the previous page allows for more flexible teaching, such as cyclical pedagogic practice, and naturally allows for the addition of socio-cultural components. Regardless of the actual learning outcomes, it can also be motivational for the students because the syllabus, or the to-do list, is transparent; students may gain a healthy feeling of completion after each item is crossed off the list.

Synthesis: The Notional-functional Syllabus

Although the NF syllabus was designed to be a step up from the grammatical syllabus, in reality it is (a) very similar in many ways, and (b) actually a step down when it comes to assessment policies. On the plus side, it is more humanistic — it allows for the additions of socio-cultural aspects and the realization of contextual influences. At the end of the day however, it is still synthetic and product-based; it is not scientific nor is it logical from a biological perspective.

The "take –home" ideas for a new syllabus:

The transparency of the NF syllabus is a major plus for the learners as it makes the goals clear and therefore potentially motivational. Moreover there is a sense of *closure* per unit, much more so than from a grammatical syllabus. Therefore, the take-home from this section is, functional goal transparency and for motivational purposes, a strong sense of closure per unit of study.

6.3 Lexical Syllabus

What is the lexical syllabus? It is a syllabus with a keen focus on lexis (vocabulary or chunk) usage. Historically, and as discussed earlier, West's *A General Service List of English Words*, was a milestone for syllabus and textbook writing, listing 2000 frequently occurring words in the English language. West's list became highly influential, becoming the backbone for lexical selection in coursebooks and graded readers. The trend that West began is still going strong today as can be seen from the catalogs from major ELT publishers such as OUP. In other words, West's list paved the road for corpus linguistics and derivative pedagogy. A modern proponent of the lexical syllabus is D. Willis with *The Lexical Syllabus* (1990), and along with J. Willis: *Collins COBILD English Course* (1990).

Lexis, not Vocabulary

Why is it called lexis and not vocabulary? Is there a significant difference between the two? The more common word is of course vocabulary, and it is often taught separately from grammar; grammar and vocabulary are seen as very separate issues. However, when a "word" is treated as having generative functionality (as in, having its own unique grammatical functionalities and idiosyncrasies), then it is upgraded to the term *lexis* (Tagg and Woodward, 2011). It can also be used for chunks or *formulaic language*, where sets of words are used as a singular utterance – often with a singular meaning. It is important to note that while on paper and within traditional grammar, individual words seem to be their own entity with their own purpose, the lexical concept of formulaic language is that small phrases can act together as a unit and are not registered as individual words within our minds. The set is seen as its own entity with its own purpose. The concept totally blurs the premise of the traditional grammar vs vocabulary dichotomy and forces us to think and re-think the psycholinguistic and pedagogical implications set forth by these notions. I shall focus on this progressive form of lexical theory and lexical syllabi, and not the simplistic 'vocabulary-like' meaning.

Generative Lexicon theory (Pustejovsky: 1998; Pustjovsky et al., 2012), although perhaps not famous in the mainstream is slowly becoming its own sub-field of study. Pustejovsky theorizes that lexicon functions generatively by:

> (1) providing words for characterizing lexical information
>
> (2) developing a framework for manipulating distinctions in word descriptions
>
> (3) formalizing a set of mechanisms for specialized composition that function in context, especially in novel situations

The third part is the distinctive part. Far too many theories of language simply ignore the fact that we can combine words uniquely and use words and grammar in novel ways based on context, without instruction. We have the capacity to create formulaic utterances 'from the air', simply based on the context we happen to be in. Berko-Gleason pioneered work in the area half a century ago with her "Wug Test", showing how children can create grammatical (appropriate sounding) utterances even with the combination of imaginary objects and words and no formal instruction on how to do so. Yet the results of her test have been used to substantiate both sides of long standing arguments (Berko-Gleason and Murphy, 2011:2):

> What followed, and not from me, were claims from some that this 'proved'
> Chomsky's theory that children have an innate language acquisition device. On the

other hand, connectionists used these findings to try to model how a child, or a machine, could learn the system through exposure to appropriate examples. Within the linguistic world, a whole controversy arose about whether children are actually operating with higher order rules (abstractions or algorithms) or if they are doing something a little less complex by looking for analogies. I think the *rules vs. analogies controversy* is still an unsettled question, and a matter of interpretation.

You can also view the Wug test results as evidence that children have the ability to abstract and generalize as part of their all purpose cognitive armamentarium, or you can think that the results are more evidence that language is a separate faculty, because what children are doing linguistically seems so much more sophisticated than their other cognitive attainments.

Generative lexicon theory embraces the fact that we can produce specialized compositions in novel situations, in a non-dictionary-like way. It is an important step forward in understanding language learning and pedagogy.

So what is a lexical *syllabus*? Although some literature discusses a lexical syllabus simplistically as a vocabulary-based syllabus, I will focus on the progressive form, as discussed above. The lexical syllabus moves away from straight grammar teaching and focuses on word/phrase usage, frequency, and their unique generative powers. Therefore, instead of moving from simple grammatical forms and gradually building up to complex forms, the lexical syllabus focuses on the unique generative properties per word or phrase with the keys being found with the usage and frequency, often based upon corpus studies. In essence, each word/phrase is treated as having its own generative word map; different usage patterns are studied per word/phrase, making the learners experts at identifying the word and its varied usages efficiently. Below (Fig. 9) is a map of the usage of HAVE.
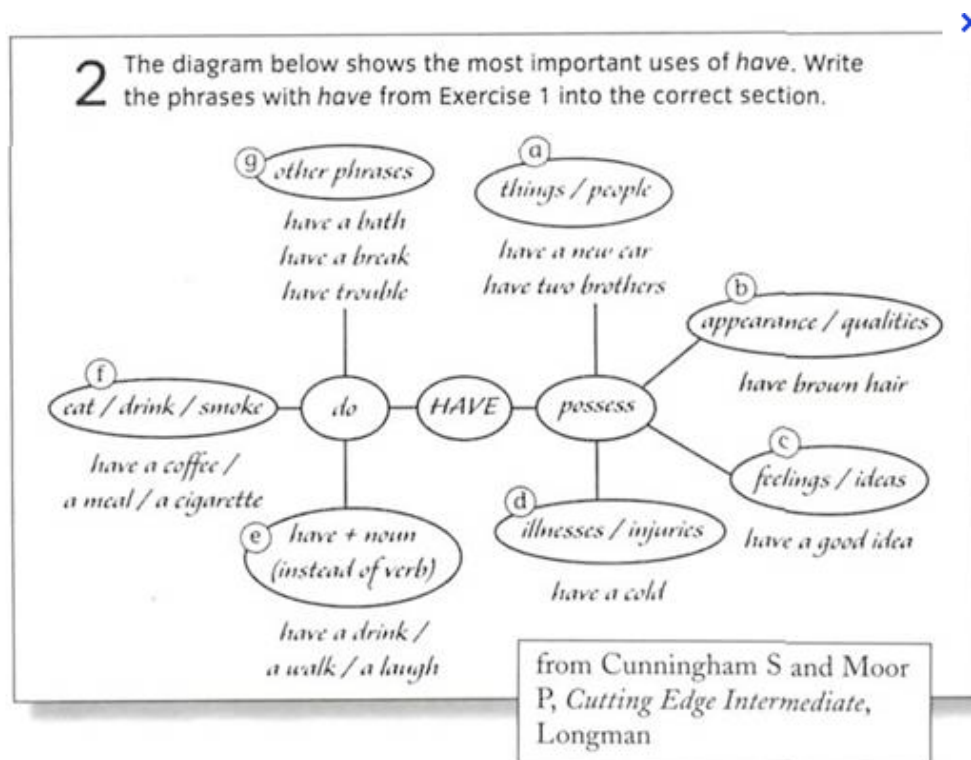
Fig.9. A map of HAVE usage, taken from a coursebook lexical activity (REF).

The lexical syllabus does not (*cannot*) offer an underlying theory of language acquisition (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) for issues implemented within Berko-Gleason's quote. However, the lexical syllabus does assume that the rote memorization of the grammatical rules of a language is not as effective as repeated exposure to naturally occurring usage. Therefore, it agrees with the cyclical syllabus.

The underlying pedagogical theory was, by viewing words/phrases as 'lexical items', the learners would be able to have a better chance of recognizing *and* using the words and phrases correctly in real word contexts because of the cyclically interconnected coverage generated from the fusion of meaning and potential usage of each lexical item. On the other hand, in the real world, a strict focus on grammar learning via a grammar syllabus would call for real-time spontaneity, creative thinking, an excellent memory, and the ability to take risks for the sake of communication. This is too much to deal with for the average learner, especially under pressure to communicate. With the real world demands put on potential grammar-based learners as users being so intense, the lexical syllabus, with the way it primes learners on all typical usages per word, *then providing them with the capacity to generate context appropriate phrases*, seems to be a much more logical and elegant pedagogy. This

was an ingenious step away from straight grammar teaching that brought to light a very new way of looking at language teaching and linguistics, but it was not without its critics.

Criticisms: The Lexical Syllabus

Pesky questions that arise with the corpus derived syllabus such as, which corpus should we choose and how should we use it? Should a beginner course use a corpus created from children's books or from adult's? Either answer (or a mixture of both), could be justifiable but the choice would significantly alter the content of the syllabus; usage and frequency vary greatly per corpus. How can we make that choice? Also, from the Willis' perspective, there is the inevitable heavy reliance of *usage analysis* on the learners' side. So, without comprehensive and cohesive analysis, the learners may gain little from the lessons. It is therefore an ambitious and demanding syllabus design for both the learners and the teachers (Tagg and Woodword, 2011). As Willis and Willis define it, the lexical syllabus has students be the researchers, while the teacher is only the facilitator, who may not know better then the learners in some cases (the results from the analysis may be just as illuminating to the teacher as it is to the learners). Lewis contradicts this by shifting the focus onto the importance of teacher talk and the teacher's output. Richards and Rodgers (2001:136) discuss how, rather than exist at either extreme, an eclectic mixture would perhaps be more favorable.

Identified problems/question with the lexical syllabus that have yet to be worked out:

(1) No standard or unifying foundational theory of language acquisition

(2) Focuses on single words or collocations too much; what about longer phrases?

(3) Should the highest frequency lexical items (such as: the, and, but, and a) be taught first, or not? [Logical arguments can be made for both paths]

(4) Willis' implementation works in tandem with task-based pedagogy. So, is the syllabus a task-based syllabus, or a lexical syllabus?

The lexical syllabus has yet to gain mainstream popularity, although it remains highly innovative *theoretically*. Perhaps the above points linger over the lexical syllabus and hamper its attractiveness to potential users. Collaborative efforts with the task-based syllabus, seem much more promising. Along those collaborative lines, Segalowitz and Gattbonton, who have done extensive work in psycholinguistic issues, provide ACCESS methodology (2005) a form of Communicative Language teaching, with innovative cyclical activities for automatization of formulaic language. Regarding the lexical syllabus, the immerging patterns

seems to be that lexical *theory* can be used for innovative purposes in other syllabi types, but it the lexical syllabus cannot hold its own.

Advantages: The Lexical Syllabus

The lexical syllabus is a novel approach to language teaching, based on research. It is therefore more scientific than other designs. Perhaps the biggest advantage of the lexical syllabus from the pragmatic point of view is the lack of guesswork; the syllabus is not based on past writers' assumptions and observations thereafter. With the focus on lexical items and usage that is based on real world usage, the learning content tends to be more natural and may even foster *deeper processing* (Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997:3). But even more importantly, the introduction of generative lexical concept was groundbreaking. Doing away with the grammar vs vocabulary dichotomy, and viewing word/phrases as having their own generative grammatical qualities based on context was a significant step forward.

Synthesis: The Lexical Syllabus

Perhaps the lexical syllabus should be summed up as "having great potential as a theory, but not developed enough to be a syllabus". It is a major theoretical syllabus type that is not globally popular, although there are currently some corpora-based coursebooks commercially available; the flagship of such coursebooks would have to be the *Touchstone* series (McCarthy, 2005) from Cambridge University Press. However, without a unifying theory underlying the teaching, the lexical syllabus remains shallow from the researcher's perspective, and it suffers from this. It is therefore often combined with other syllabus types, such as the task-based syllabus, discussed in the next subsection.

The "take –home" ideas for the new syllabus:

By far, the greatest take away would have to be the generative lexical concept – the viewing of words/phrases as having their own generative grammatical properties and unique nuances based on context. The inspection of this concept into the new syllabus would certainly help to be a much more dynamic syllabus.

6.4 Task-based Syllabus

What is a task-based (TB) syllabus? In theory, it is a type of syllabus that is learning-centered (not to be confused with learn*er*-centered). It therefore should be a *procedural* syllabus based upon teacher selected tasks that are assumed to promote the language

acquisition process, while downplaying the learning of pre-selected linguistic content (Tagg and Woodward, 2011). Skehan's view (1998:260) is that the students should be given freedom within the framework of the tasks for real communicative engagement in the tasks. Skehan's view can also be construed as being learn*er*-centered, making it a hybrid learn*ing* and learn*er* syllabus. More importantly, in contrast to other types of syllabi discussed earlier that have little or no pedagogical protocols, the TB syllabus, grounded in task-based methodology, is a syllabus that is inseparable from the methodology. In other words, it is a syllabus that is based on a clear methodology and theory. That said, defining what a task actually is or isn't has not been easy, and has become the cause of some controversy, muddling up the clarity of the methodology. Moreover, Dörnyei (2009) discusses how TB is little more than a repackaged form of communicative language teaching (or perhaps notional-functional), with the most significant difference being that it may incorporate a bit more *focus on form*. It may be controversial to say this, but since TB is so grounded in methodology, it could/should probably primarily be viewed as a method instead of a syllabus type. In that way it could be meshed with other syllabi, fortifying its own mission while enhancing the 'other' syllabi, as with the lexis-TB culmination discussed in the previous section.

What is a task?

Anything related to learning can be construed as a task, but such a wide-ranging definition is not very helpful. Van den Branden (2006) concurs. He proposes that it should be an activity that has a communicative goal to be met via meaningful usage of language, rather than, but not exclusive of a *focus on form*. In other words, it can be just about any communicative classroom activity that does not have a keen focus on grammatical accuracy. Not everyone agrees.

Below are a few typical definitions:

Nunan: A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or   interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on form.(1989:10)

Van den Branden: An activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language. (2006:4)

Edwards and Willis:

-The principal focus of a task is on the negotiation of meaning rather than language form

-Learners are aware of the goal or purpose of the task, which may include creating a list or a map, of solving a problem

-The outcome of the task is to be shared with other students

-Listening, reading, writing and/or speaking may be involved

-Language focused study is incorporated into a TBL lesson, but not generally until after the task is completed, so that learners remain focused on the communicative purpose of the task. (2005:3)

Skehan (1998:95) takes is further and emphasizes the need to make the task emulate real world usage with the goal being the solution of a real world 'problem'. This seems to be the natural and logical extension of this methodology, however, Van den Branden (2006:6) argues the validity in real world problem solving within the classroom. Just how realistic can an artificial environment be?

Perhaps the more global question is, compared to the TB syllabus, how realistic are the other types of syllabi and their textbooks? J. Willis (1996a:68) calls them "impoverished and restricted". They only render caricatures or over-simplified versions of usage. Communicative significance and socio-cultural nuances are often stripped from, or rendered undetectable from the material because they are presented in packages. D. Willis (1996:51) concurs, "we know that language is a complex system which cannot be 'presented' to learners in a series of neat packages".

But is the TB syllabus the answer? J. Willis (1996a:88), realized the need to expand; learners needed real-time interaction outside of the classroom for exposure to semi-prefabricated chunks of usage, which could lead to top-down discourse analysis. In this way we can see how Willis and Willis bring corpus analysis and TBL together.

If linear learning is a fallacy and naturally cyclical learning (relying on each learner's internal analytical processing that is not directly controlled by the teacher) is closer to reality (as discussed by Dörnyei, 2009), then the TB syllabus should have more potential for elegant language learning and teaching.

Results from TB learning are not linear and therefore may not be immediate (Skehan, 1996:18-19). For this reason, TB does not *directly* teach grammar nor does it expect learners to rote-memorize grammar points. Learners are seen as hypothesizers that learn from implicit

and explicit guesswork via task work, or a *conscious* focus on meaning via interaction with an *unconscious* focus on structures (Skehan, 1996:18-19).

The TB syllabus is the first introduced here that seriously considers the cognitive processing and development of students. Important keywords are *meaningful interaction*, *authentic language*, *analysis*, and *motivation* (Tagg and Woodward, 2011). Long and Crookes (1991), and Prabhu (1987) also argue similarly, with a focus on the importance of negotiation of meaning and the reliance of analytical internal processes, while J. Willis (1996b) also stresses the importance of student motivation.

How is the TB syllabus designed?

The typical J. Willis (1996b) style has three parts:

Pre-task: introduction to the topic, the task, special words/phrases

Task cycle: small group work; teacher is monitor; plan and prepare in small groups for a public demonstration of their outcomes.

Language focus: not to be grammar-focused, but exploration of language usage for consciousness-raising and reduction of fossilization.

Because the term of 'task' is so inherently wide, there have been a number of classifications that have been mandated over the years:

Task Classification: Dichotomies

Nunan (1989a): *real world tasks vs pedagogical tasks*

Long (1989): *divergent vs convergent*

Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (1993): *one way vs two way*

Willis and Willis (2007:72-78), focusing on cognitive processes list these seven *requirements* for tasks:

-Listing

-Ordering and sorting

-Visual support

-Matching

-Comparing and contrasting

-Problem solving tasks and puzzles

-Projects and creative tasks

-Sharing personal experiences

No matter what the task, there is a heavy reliance on autonomous discovery along with peer-to-peer affect (inclusive of help *and* pressure). Although this may seem a bit too idealistic, it does emulate real world interaction, probably more realistic than any of the other syllabi introduced so far. But it should be noted that the other syllabi were basically method-less (lacking in theory), whereas TB is the deliberate meshing of theory, method, and syllabus.

Criticisms: The Task-based Syllabus

Are there criticisms of the TB syllabus? Samuda and Bygate (2008) find it to be controversial and to be an attractor of vocal critics, as does Dörnyei (2009). Van Avermaet and Gysen (2006:29) identify three problems: (1) specificity, (2) complexity and (3) extrapolation. Regarding specificity, it is assumed that the teacher/writer bases specifications on some sort of a needs analysis, but is it really possible for the teacher/writer to be able to come up with an appropriate set of tasks for every student need? If not, how useful would approximations be? Regarding complexity, how is a task to be rated? Key words are *cognitive familiarity*, *cognitive effort,* and *communicative stress.* Indeed, these are concepts that can be scientifically tested for with fMRI machines, and perhaps EEG machines, but using them in the classroom can be problematic, especially the fMRI due to its size and noise, among other issues. Long (1985) and Duran and Ramaut (2006) discuss their views from external observations, which ironically, will not produce accurate results. So, assessing complexity seems to be a complex, if not almost impossible undertaking.

Regarding extrapolation, how much can be expected from the learners? How much should the teacher attempt to induce? If a teacher 'caves in' and sums up the learning with explicit grammar instruction, would that negate the previous learning, or add to it? What if the students request explicit grammatical instruction during the task? Would it actually be 'wrong' to assist them? These are all important questions that each TB proponent may have different answers to, making the TB syllabus much less transparent and more confusing than it idealistically set out to be.

Moreover, Edwards and Willis (2005:27-8) point out that teachers comfortable with a grammar-based syllabus may actually be hostile toward TB learning because of the lack of control over language usage and linguistic outcomes. Indeed, a non-native English teacher may not feel competent enough to facilitate English language learning that has no answer sheets or rulebook to fall back on. Without a native or native-like competence, how can they

assess the learning output *competently*?   They would not be able to. This is perhaps the number one reason for the popularity of the *grammatical* syllabus among non-native teachers in countries such as Japan – you don't need to have a native-like competence as long as you have an answer sheet or rulebook to assess by.

Advantages: The Task-based Syllabus

Are there advantages to the TB syllabus? There are several, some on the theoretical level and some on the pragmatic level. For one, it acknowledges the inadequacies of all product syllabi; it takes into account human cognition and cognitive development by being a process based syllabi. It is also procedural. It builds and relies on learner autonomy — something very real and important when the student leaves the classroom. Also, students will inevitably be at different levels of competence and motivation in any classroom. By consistently using group work in the beginning, (1) learners of different levels may feel less pressure because of the smaller number of eyes on them at any given moment, (2) learners implicitly and explicitly motivate each other and help negotiate meaning with each other at a group level, and (3) no matter how intuitive a teacher/writer may be, their predictions regarding teaching order cannot replace real-time language usage during a realistic task (Cox, 2005).

The "take –home" ideas for a new syllabus:

TB as a method is fantastic, however, it should probably not be conceived of as a full stand-alone syllabus. That said, the methodology of TB is progressive and well thought out. Certainly because of this, there are a number of good take-home ideas for a new syllabus:

    (1) focus on the process

    (2) raise autonomy by letting the learners make learning/usage choices

    (3) implement small group work → move to big group work

    (4) make liberal open-ended tasks

    (5) provide realtime focus on form sessions

6.5 Content-based syllabus

What is content-based instruction (CBI)? Is not all learning 'content-based'? According to Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989:vii), it is the "integration of content learning with language teaching aims. More specifically, it refers to the concurrent study of language and subject matter, with the form and sequence of language presentation dictated by content

material." Historically, CBI has very pragmatic roots, for example, according to Larsen-Freeman et al., the roots were based in "the 'language across the curriculum' movement for native English speakers in England, which was launched in the 1970s to integrate the teaching of reading and writing into all other subject areas."

What good came of this? Some potent criticisms of standard L2 teaching have been (1) the separation of 'meaningfullness' from the language being taught (Kelly, personal communication, Aug., 2012), and (2) the 'dumbing-down' of the content; the learners are typically treated as *cognitively deficient people* (Murphy, 2009). But how else can you teach the basics of an L2? If you are teaching an L2, isn't it inevitable that you end up treating learners as being cognitively deficient? For example, Klein's (2001: 13768) says, "Linguists and laymen alike tend to consider children's way to their mother tongue to be the most important type of language acquisition."

CBI does away with this seemingly irrevocable dilemma. With a content-based syllabus, the learners are given a real topic to study that presumably matches their cognitive capabilities, and expects them to make do with the content's learning via their L2. It provides the learners with a cognitive challenge that is realistically motivating in a way that is disconnected from the typical focus on language learning. Although it may sound counterintuitive and/or counterproductive, especially from a grammar-based teaching perspective, this type of learning calls for and expects the onset of natural motivation to use the language to accomplish the activity without ever having to focus on the language usage as an integral part of the learning.

In CBI, the L2 usage is not necessarily seen as anything other than what it presents as its innate instrumental value. In short, the L2 is no longer the *subject* of study; the L2 becomes the *means* to reach the goal. Brown (2001:49-50) seems to concur by saying, "Content-based classrooms may yield an increase in intrinsic motivation and empowerment, since students are focused on subject matter that is important to their lives." The topic of *empowerment* shall play a crucial role in later chapters. Brown continues, "Students are pointed beyond transient extrinsic factors, like grades and tests, to their own competence and autonomy as intelligent individuals capable of actually doing something with their new language."(p50). Larsen-Freeman et al. (2011:144), state that, "CBI can also be an effective way for students to learn language in the language class, using themes that students find of interest. Such themes provide sustained motivation beyond intermediate levels of proficiency and prepare students." It seems there is a consensus regarding the motivational qualities and the real-world qualities of CBI, at least on a theoretical level.

Criticisms

With such a promising foundation, what could be wrong with CBI? On the theoretical level, it does look quite promising. However, several drawbacks can be uncovered. For one, finding suitable content may prove to be difficult depending upon the composition of the students' needs. Also, would CBI be appropriate of all age groups? --Probably not. Therefore, because CBI attempts to *not* 'dumb-down' the content, it may not be suitable to both young learners and novice learners; the study of linguistic structures would seem to be a necessary step before a meaningful stab at CBI could be made for novice adult learners. But these are relatively minor quibbles.

The most significant criticism would be that when and if students fall into the flow of CBI in a meaningful way, they can all-to-easily disregard the *means* (the L2) and 'triumphantly' reach their *ends* with their L1, and be fully satisfied with the outcome. This is due to the fact that the L2 usage, while expected, is secondary to reaching the set goal. Teachers can monitor and 'police' the L2 usage to some extent, but if students are motivated to comply with reaching the set cognitively challenging goal, it is quite within their natural state for them to lose their periphery self control (due to mechanisms related to *flow*, [Csikszentmihalyi, 2008]) and slip back into their L1.

There is a second problem that is not solely a CBI issue, but a serious issue nevertheless – L2 learners should have at least some explicit L2 instruction. Implicit style learning alone is not the best way to learn the L2 (Dörnyei, 2009; Lighbown and Spada, 1999). Admittedly, CBI can include explicit L2 learning, but because the basic premise is to make the L2 learning secondary to a nonlinguistic learning goal, it is natural to assume that learners within a CBI framework may not be able to receive ample focus on form.

Advantages

The biggest two advantages of CBI must be (1) the motivational aspects that coincide with empowerment and meaningful goals, and (2) the fact that student are no longer only focused on studying *about* the L2, but using it as needed, naturally. Furthermore, CBI is easy to implement. In fact, it does not need a specialized coursebook; any English language book from other school subjects could serve as the centerpiece of a CBI course.

Synthesis

In theory, even considering its drawbacks, CBI is full of potential. In fact, it is popular around the globe -- clothed with different titles. For example, what is the difference between CBI and *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP)? Depending upon who you listen do, they either have considerable overlap, or they are practically identical, with the latter perhaps allowing for more focus on English language learning than the former. Instead of saying that CBI is a synonym of ESP, Whong (2011) goes so far as to say that CBI is a *type* of ESP. From a theoretical SLA perspective, the ESP framing may have the advantage because it would seem to have more inclination to focus on form than CBI would.

The "take –home" ideas for a new syllabus:

Because CBI forces focus on content-based goals yet can implement open-ended responses, it is similar to TBL. It is much wider in scope though, because it is not limited to language task implementation; it is focused on real world learning, not language learning *per se*. The take-home ideas for the new syllabus are: (1) forget about language tasks at least part of the time → get learners to really learn something new to challenge their intellect, (2) empower the learners by doing something meaningful with the new learning

7. Conclusions

In this paper I discussed five major syllabus types: *grammatical*, *notional-functional*, *lexical*, *task-based*, and *content based*. The oldest of the four is the grammatical syllabus and being based on the teaching a dead language, *Latin*, it has proven to be not well suited for practical language learning such as conversational language learning. That said, being the oldest and most naturally 'back to basics' approach for explicit teaching that we have conceived of historically, it seems to have a naturally appealing quality for (uninformed) learners and teachers whom are past the age of puberty or their *critical/sensitive stage* of natural language learning. Because they are past this stage, they are probably less likely to be able to implicitly (unconsciously) pick up their L2. *"Post-critical period SLA is notorious for its difficulty, high degree of variation, and often very poor outcome. The primary aim of L2 instruction is to ameliorate, if not solve, these problems."* (Doughty 2003: 256). This leaves learners and teachers with mainly explicit measures -- grammatical methodologies are well suited for such logically explicit analysis of the L2. So the appeal is high. The only problem, and this is a major problem, is that explicit analysis and memorization of L2 grammatical structures has not been proven to actually improve L2 fluency, and in fact has been shown to

be detrimental in some cases (Lightbown and Spada: 1999). That said, some focus on form seems to be helpful for learners.

Finding the correct balance between accuracy and fluency is sometimes described as "an art more than a science". This is due to the inevitable affect of contextual variables and motivational dynamics that *statically* designed syllabi (often top down) cannot take account for. The *NF syllabus* was designed to be an ingenious improvement over the grammatical syllabus but because it is still product-based and static, it carries over many of the same criticisms from the *grammatical syllabus*.

I would like to applaud the *lexical syllabus* for being scientifically oriented, but without its own theoretical pedagogy, it is vague and somewhat lifeless as a stand-alone syllabus. It is therefore often paired with task-based learning, which is also a limping syllabus type, if it is an actual syllabus type all. While these two fit together well enough as a mesh of ideas, and they do seem to have good potential as a team, they have never gained substantial global popularity in the classroom (currently a hot topic for researches on a theoretical level though). This may be because the methodology is complicated to understand, and because task-based activities depend upon the teacher as being a monitor and facilitator. However, non-native teachers may feel inadequate when it comes time to assess without a provided set of concrete 'correct' responses that they can fall back on, while native teachers may find their mandated job as monitor and facilitator too simplistic, and perhaps a waste of their talents as an instructor.

The final syllabus type was *content-based* (and variant, *English for Specific Purposes*). This syllabus type is commendable for downplaying the 'classroom subject' aspect of English, by doing away with learning *about* English and focusing on simply *engaging* in interesting learning *via* English as a tool. I would argue that content-based learning potentially lacks a significant form on focus, while *English for Specific Purposes* puts the English back into focus. So, although they are very similar, there is a significant difference with the inherent amount of focus on form. CB is inherently more fluency based while ESP is more accuracy based.

Is there a 'best' syllabus type from the bunch? Frankly, they all have strengths and weaknesses. There is no 'best' syllabus yet. It is therefore important to find the best points from all of them, and attempt to synthesize them into a dynamic syllabus for the future. My

forthcoming follow-up paper will discuss material development in light of this, with all of the best ideas culminating into a new 'best practices' syllabus to be tested upon in classrooms as a research project.

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